

## History of the James Madison Chiles Villa

The James Madison Chiles Spanish Revival Villa is saturated in history and represents one of the homes in the city of Asheville as well as the entire Western North Carolina region.

Its original Owner, James Madison Chiles was a developer from Lenoir, North Carolina, who initially made his fortune in the furniture industry.

After visiting Asheville on business, James Madison Chiles experienced what is now known as the Old Kenilworth Inn. Chiles eventually became one of the business partners of the Old Kenilworth Inn and decided to buy property additional property in the Kenilworth area. Chiles purchased, what was at the time called, the Patton Farm and would eventually become the site of his legacy. Kenilworth, at the time, was a town independent from the city of Asheville, but eventually it would be Chiles' residential development that would become synonymous with the former town of Kenilworth. In 1929 Kenilworth residents took a vote, and agreed to allow the town to be annexed by the city of Asheville.

In 1909, tragedy struck the Old Kenilworth Inn when a fire burned the building completed to the ground. James Madison Chiles promised that the old hotel would rise from the ashes. After much struggle to raise funds needed to rebuild the inn, a bank in Canada provided Chiles with the financial backing he needed and the new Kenilworth Inn was opened in 1917.

Chiles then set out to introduce the idea of planned residential development to the Asheville area. Kenilworth was an experiment and subdivision for the city long before its time. Finally in the early 1920's, Chiles planned development came to fruition. A new neighborhood was built, complete with a man made lake, supported by the newly constructed Kenilworth Dam. With incredible vistas to the neighboring mountain ranges, lots began to sell at a "better than expected" pace. James Madison Chiles and his sister were particularly interested in history and genealogy, hence the unique street names throughout Kenilworth, which relate back to Kenilworth Castle in England.

Once the majority of the lots were sold in this development, James Madison Chiles then hired Architect, Ronald Green to design a new home for he and his family. After four years of construction, the home was finally completed in 1922. The house was a Spanish Revival structure with Italian Baroque detailing rivaled by, perhaps only the estate of George W. Vanderbilt. The "Villa" as it became known, was a rambling masterpiece constructed of hollow clay tile block, finished with thick plaster based stucco and consisting of three separate structures: The main home, the carriage house with living quarters for the main attached to it, and a free standing, open air structure which was affectionately called the "summer cottage." These structures are connected by tall privacy walls, which create three separate exterior courtyards, each with water fountains. The main home had a Porte Cochere used loading and unloading family and guests from horse drawn carriages, while offering protection from the weather. The design of the main home consisted of 14 rooms and over 5,000 square feet of floor space. A 2,000 square foot lower floor came complete with windows to allow for daylighting of the below grade spaces. The Main Floor Plan was designed to take advantage of the outdoors and all of the private courtyards. All rooms on this level (except the bathroom) have doors that open directly to the outdoors or to one of the three courtyards. The doors all have multiple leafs, and are adorned with hardware constructed of the finest brass available at the time. It is believed that the famous local architect turned blacksmith Anthony Lord designed the door hardware. Lord was the creator of much of the metal works seen at college campuses such as Yale and Harvard. The most interesting rooms on the Main Floor are the Dining Room and the Library. The Dining room is constructed of plaster walls that are flanked with Baroque pilasters and column capitals. These pilasters form barrel vaults in the ceiling and frame a multi-tiered tray ceiling above. On the East wall of the room, three pairs of round top doors open directly onto the adjacent courtyard space. The floor was covered with quarter-sawn oak.

The Library is decorated floor to ceiling with raised wood panels constructed of locally cut black walnut. The panels terminate at a wooden frieze that consists of crown molding and dentils. This frieze and its detailing, create a cove around the ceiling that holds continuous lighting. The East wall has two pair of bookshelves, made of the same black walnut covering the remainder of the room. Each of these two shelves

was designed with an enlarged base used to disguise elements in the room that the Owner did not want visible. In one case, the base was used to disguise the radiators used to heat the room and on the opposite side, the base was split into two hidden compartments, used to hide alcohol during the Prohibition period. This room also has three pairs of doors that open to the side yard, and two of the private exterior courtyards. The floor was covered with quarter-sawn oak.

Also included on the first floor are the Butlers Bedroom and Bathroom, as well as the Kitchen, Living Room and unique curved Entry Foyer. Two sets of stairs led to the Upper Floor. The Main Staircase, flanked by dual wooden columns and triple arches, was used by the family and guests. The Servants Staircase led from the Kitchen to the Upper Floor as well (this staircase no longer exists).

The Living Room is on the North end of the Main Floor and includes an exterior screened porch. Eventually the roof and screening were removed from the home, leaving an exterior terrace. The main features of the Living Room are its huge fireplace; mahogany raised wood wainscot panels and four pairs of multi-leafed exterior doors. The ceiling was designed with massive wooden beams, which were eventually removed during renovations.

In continuing the home's connection with the exterior, the Upper Floor plan was designed with three expansive balconies. Two are covered with awnings and a third was designed for outdoor sunning. Each of the three balconies overlooks at least one of the private courtyards below and each has solid walls at their entire perimeter to add to the aspect of privacy. Two of the balconies (and one bedroom) are connected via an outdoor hallway which is flanked by twin wooden columns with exaggerated crown molding, scroll type wooden brackets and three detailed cast concrete panels at the exterior wall. The Sun Balcony and the exterior hallway, are finished with red Spanish quarry tile flooring. The Master Bedroom Balcony is private and accessible only from the Master Bedroom. The third Balcony is accessible directly from the Upper Floor Foyer and the exterior hallway. The Upper Floor was used mainly for sleeping quarters for the family and guests. Here there are four Bedrooms and two Bathrooms. A third bathroom was added during renovations in the space formerly occupied by the Servants Staircase. The Master Bedroom is large enough to include the sleeping areas and a sitting area. It has a private master Bathroom, which included a sunken tub and a shower, which was virtually an unknown amenity at the time. This shower was originally constructed with over 20 individual shower heads, which have been removed over time. The Junior Master Bedroom, is also large enough to have its own sitting area, with access to a walk-in closet and two different Bathrooms. With windows on the East and West walls, this room receives plentiful sunlight through the day.

The Upper Floor also includes perhaps one of the most famous rooms in the home, known as the Pink Bathroom. This bathroom still retains its original glazed pink and black ceramic tile walls and floor. This bold choice of colors, while not a choice that immediately comes to mind in today's styles, resulted in such a striking and beautiful room, that it has the official title of the "most photographed and published room in the house." The bathroom also includes a miniature coal-burning fireplace.

The Upper Floor is rounded out with two additional Bedrooms, each with a bathing alcove, which housed lavatories for basic hygiene. These lavatories were removed during renovations and now serve as alcoves for furniture. The entire Upper Floor was finished in quarter sawn oak flooring. This flooring is still in tact today.

Baroque Italian detailing can be found in many places on the home's exterior. Perhaps the home's most noticeable ornamentation is seen at the Front Entry, where the passage to the front door is through a pair of Baroque Italian style columns, each topped with dual eagle heads. These columns support a classically designed cornice, above which rests a grand family crest flanked by flowing scrolls. The Porte Cochere is flanked with triple arches, with each arch being decorated with Italian Baroque style twisted columns made of concrete. The apex of each arch contains a medallion in the Baroque style as well.

Ironically, not long after the home was completed, James Madison Chiles died in 1926, leaving the home to his wife Leah Arcouer Chiles and their family. During the 1930's and the Great Depression, the Chiles assets were virtually wiped out and Leah Chiles made an attempt to salvage the family's finances through

the Kenilworth Realty Company. After much struggle, all of the family's assets were auctioned off on the Buncombe County Courthouse steps in 1939 for \$1,200 dollars.

During a brief time period, the James Madison Chiles House was owned by Prudential Bank, until it was sold to the Medici Family, one of the most famous families throughout the history of the time. The Medici Family owned the house until 1951, when it was sold back to John Chiles and his wife Ann. John and Ann Chiles owned the house until 1959, when they sold it to Hope Ryan who lived in the home until 2003.